A

LETTER

From a GENTLEMAN in the

COUNTREY

To some of his

Familiar Friends

AT

LONDON,

Shewing from the PRINCIPLES of the

JESUITS

That their

Protestations at their Death

Is no Argument of their

INNOCENCY.

LONDON,
Printed in the Year 1679.

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From a Gentleman in the Countrey to ſome of his Familiar Friends at *London*, &c.

My worthy Friends,

AMong the manifold Occurrences which this time doth fruitfully miniſter for exerciſing of mens thoughts, and which gave me with you, while at *London*, plentiful occaſion of Diſcourſing together; That concerning the Plot may juſtly challenge a chief place. The pleaſant entertainment your friendly and kind Converſe did afford me, while I was among you, doth eaſily engage me to adventure to tranſmit unto you my more ſerious and retired thoughts upon that Subject, being more able, both compoſedly to perpend, and ſedately to digeſt them, when I am removed from the hurry and confuſed and contradictory noiſes of that place; which labour of mine, however Impolite, yet, as being plain and from your Friend, I hope will not prove troubleſom, but rather acceptable unto You.

You need not my Information to know, that there hath ſcarce any thing faln out in this Age, of Matter of Fact, concerning which the Judgments of Men do more vaſtly differ, than about this Plot; for many do look upon it as a thing ſo plain and evident, that it is to do manifeſt violence to our underſtandings and ſenſe, to make the leaſt queſtion of it; beſides, That they judge it to be a moſt abuſive accuſing of the Juſtice of our *Engliſh* Nation, to make any doubt thereof; ſince, not only the Common Juries have found the Evidences ſufficient, but the Great Council of the Nation, always commended for their Solidity and Sobriety, have, as with one Voice, declared their full Convincement thereof.

Others there are, who ſcruple not to affirm that there never was any ſuch thing as a Plot, and that there is as yet no ſufficient Evidence produced, to convince any impartial, unprejudiced man thereof, in reſpect there is little or nothing for Proof, ſave the meer Affirmation of the Witneſſes, who being Perſons under ſuch Circumſtances, until the very time they pretend to make this Diſcovery, as ought not by their bare Teſtimony to have ſuch weight in a matter of this Conſequence, eſpecially being flatly contradicted by other Witneſſes. To this is objected, as Evidences of Fact, *Colemans* Letters, that of *Pedre*, and the Death of Sir *Edmondbury Godfrey*. To which they make Anſwer, That as for *Colemans* Letters, they have nothing relating to the Kings Murther, which was the great Hinge upon which the ſucceſs of the Plot depended. That of *Pedre* is only ſuſpicious by reaſon of other concurring Circumſtances, for of it ſelf it could not have proved a ſufficient Evidence. And as to *Godfrey*'s

Death,

Death, it is Anſwered, That although that Matter of Fact be undeniable, that he was Murthered, yet it is not ſo manifeſt by whom ; ſince the chief Witneſs did once ſolemnly deny, what he before and ſince has affirmed, and there have been no improbable inſinuations publiſhed, attributing it to the Contrivance of the Earl of *Danby*. Theſe things I thought meet only to mention, and not to inſiſt upon, leaving to every one to judge of the weight of the reſpective Reaſons, as they ſhall ſee moſt cauſe : and becauſe I do not find that in any of theſe, ſuch as ſeek to diſprove the Plot, place the greateſt weight, but chiefly in the Speeches and Proteſtations of the Five Jeſuits at their Death, therefore that is the matter I purpoſe chiefly to conſider: which as I have ſeriouſly weighed in my ſelf, ſo I will commit the ſame to writing with that candor, as I may avoid the leaſt occaſion of deceiving either my ſelf or others. I love not to force my ſelf unto the belief of a lie out of prejudice to any, nor yet refrain to believe a Truth, however it may prove to the diſadvantage of thoſe I may love: as I would not have blind charity to my greateſt Friends, ſo I would not deny true charity to my greateſt Enemies, knowing the one to be no leſs hurtful than the other.

Abſtracting then from the probability or not probability of the Plot, upon the nature of the Evidence, or other concurring Circumſtances, or how far it may be made manifeſt to be a very natural conſequence of Popiſh Principles, of which much and well hath been ſaid by others; The great Queſtion here to be enquired into, is, Whether it be probable, that if ſuch a thing had been true, and theſe Perſons guilty of it, they would or could have denyed it, in ſuch poſitive, expreſs and ſolemn terms, as they did at the very inſtant of their Death? or what temptation could be ſtrong enough to perſwade men to do that which themſeves declared they did abhor, (to wit, *all Equivocation or formal Prolocution whatſoever*) *in ipſo mortis articulo?* Since whatever may be the abſurdities of their Religion otherwiſe, it is known they believe a God, a Heaven, and a Hell, and the Immortality of the Soul, and rewards and puniſhments for mens actions, eſpecially the men being confeſſed to have been of ſober and ſerious Converſations, according to their own Principles, and in Morals ſuppoſed far to have exceeded ſome men of the Reformed Religion.

I hope now I have as fully and advantageouſly expreſſed the matter, as any *Roman Catholick* could deſire, in ſo few words; and I muſt alſo ingenuouſly acknowledge, that I cannot agree to their ſentiment, who endeavour to get over this difficulty, by apprehending there was ſome ſecret falacy in the Priſoners Expreſſions at their Execution: for I cannot judge the men would place their Eternal happineſs upon ſo mean a quibble; nor do I incline to the judgment of ſuch as are apt to believe, that either with reſpect to Abſolution before received, they did affirm themſelves to be as innocent as the *Child unborn*, or that they truſted to the Abſolution they might have or did receive from one another, after they ended their Speeches, as reckoning thereby, all guilt they might by ſuch denying have incurred, would be cleanſed and removed from them; for that ſeemeth to me improbable for the former Reaſon, in reſpect it is a received Doctrine of the Church of *Rome*, That no Abſolution can prove effectual, but where the Party confeſſing doth truly repent of and deteſt the evil committed, reſolving to amend, which could not be in this Caſe.

And yet nevertheleſs, I think it no hard matter to conceive, that theſe men might in ſuch ſolemn manner affirm themſelves to be innocent, though really

really guilty, and that not only to preſerve and advance the Intereſt of their Cauſe; but as ſeriouſly and deliberately believing that to do ſo, was the way to pleaſe God, and to advantage their own Souls: and this ſeemeth to me not at all ſtrange, but eaſily imaginable, and that without the leaſt breach of Charity or injury to thoſe dying men, for making which appear, let it be conſidered.

That a true and ſolid Judgment of mens actions, with reſpect to their future and Eternal Condition, is not to be made according to our Principles, who make the Judgment, but according to theirs whoſe actions are to be Judged of. That may ſeem very hurtful and pernicious to the Soul in the Judgment of one man, which is believed to be moſt beneficial and advantageous by another; therefore they are like to miſtake this caſe, who in charity judge hard to believe that to be true of the Papiſts, becauſe our Principles would reckon it abominable. If their plain acknowledgment did not put it beyond doubts, perhaps it might be reckoned as great a breach of Charity, to believe that theſe men could think, that the words of a Prieſt could convert Bread and Wine to the Fleſh and Bloud of Chriſt, and not only ſo, but unto the very Godhead; ſo that what was formerly real Bread, doth become in an inſtant, by the Breath of a Prieſt, (though the moſt debauched profligate Villain living) that true and omnipotent God who created all things, and that bleſſed Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who is the great Mediator; and that therefore to that Wafer, which both Reaſon and Senſe aſſures us is ſtill the ſame, is due all the Worſhip, Adoration, Reverence and Subjection we owe to Almighty God. Now if we may ſuppoſe, and that without breach of Charity, as ſurely we can, that Wiſe men, that men who (in a ſence) may be called good men, ſuch as believe there is a God, ſuch as really labor for the Salvation of their Souls, ſeek to avoid many ſins, yea, all they Judge ſuch, for that end, and ſtudy earneſtly to mortify themſelves: I ſay, If ſuch can believe this, and for this end, as judging thereby to pleaſe God and go to Heaven, firmly perſwading themſelves, they ſhould offend God and endanger the Salvation of their Souls, if they did otherways; I would willingly know of ſober men, what thing can be ſo ſtrange, but the Wiſeſt men may be ſuppoſed to do it for this end, having once drunk in a Principle, that in ſo doing God will be well pleaſed with them. If then it can be demonſtrated, that theſe Jeſuits, upon Principles receiyed, and from their very entring into that Profeſſion, drunk in by them, might really, and even as Wiſe men ſo circumſtantiated, believe, that ſuch their Proteſtations at their Death, though contrary to the Truth of matter of Fact, was pleaſing to God, and the way to advantage their Souls, then it will be no ſtrange thing to conceive, nor no harſh thing to judge this might be done by them.

To make this then appear, I ſhall propoſe ſome few things out of their great Father *Ignatius Loyola* his Inſtructions and Rules to them: in his Epiſtle to his Brethren at *Portugal*, He recomends to them to excel *not in Faſtings and Watchings, as the other Monks, but in the renowned ſimplicity of a blind obedience*, which obliged them to *ſubſcribe without condition to the Orders of their Superior, albeit he ſhould have but little Counſel or Prudence to defend theſe his Orders: Moreover, to offer themſelves by this obedience altogether in Sacrifice, renounce willingly to all their own right, for to enſlave themſelves and give themſelves up to the Conduct of the ſame Superior, as they would do to that of Divine Providence*, from whence he Concludes *that it cannot be denied, but ſuch an Obedience comprehends not only the exe-*

cution to do that which is enjoyned, and the will to do it cheerfully, but the judgment to make appear right and true (so far as the will can by its force bow the understanding) Injunctions and Sentiments of the Superior, adding moreover, *That this renowned simplicity of blind Obedience is lost, if we move this Question to our selves,* (viz.) *Whether they command right or not; and therefore we must confirm our selves in this resolution, that whatsoever the Superior Commands, is the Ordinance of God himself; And as they ought to apply themselves with all their courage and affection to believe what the Catholick Faith proposes, so also they ought to be carried by a certain impetuous blindness of the will, to do whatsoever the Superior says, being desirous to obey without any disquisition or search whatsoever, believing it was thus that* Abraham *carried himself, when he received the Commandment to offer up his Son. In short, That they force and subject their Will and Judgment.*

And in the 6th. part of his Constitutions there are the same precepts: he wills, *That they obey when they have but a sign of the will of their Superior without any express Commandment; that they ought to perswade themselves, that those who live under obedience ought to suffer themselves to be carried and governed in the Divine Providence by their Superiors, as if they were a* Cadaver *which is transported any ways, or in any manner as men please, and as the Staff of an Old Man, which serves him to hold in his hand every where, and in what thing or manner he pleases to use it, and that they be perswaded, that whatsoever the Superior has Commanded is just, rejecting and overcoming (as by force) by a blind obedience all their own Opinion and Judgment, that may be to the contrary, that in service they resign up their own Will and Judgment, and have no Judgment of their own.*

Having thus shewn in the express words of *Ignatius*, the Constitution of the Jesuits, which by Oath they do oblige themselves to fulfil; I will in charity suppose, that these Jesuits who Suffered at Tyburn did honestly and sincerely enter into this Society, as being greatly perswaded in their minds, that thereby they would glorify God and advantage their own Souls; and that accordingly, they looked upon such Rules, as the most effectual means for accomplishing that end, their judgment and understanding being no less fully possest with the Faith thereof, than with the Faith of Transubstantiation, Infalabillity, or the Supremacy of the See and Bishop of *Rome*, which all understanding men know to be firmly believed by all real *Roman Catholicks*, as that which is a Faith necessary to lead to Heaven; and that many both Wise and Serious men among them, have and do live and die in this Perswasion. The case being then thus, may it not rationally be judged that upon Discovery of the Plot, the Superiors of these Jesuits, as well for preserving the Interest and Honor of their Religion, as for delivering themselves from the imputation of so odious a Fact, did command these Jesuits, or at leastwise give them some sign by which they might understand, it was their mind they should solemnly declare in as full and ample words as could be conceived, that they *were as innocent as Children unborn*, of all they were charged with: for the more full and expressive the words were, there lay the greater mystery both of concealing the Plot, and jumbling mens minds concerning it; in which case is it any wonder, that these men did very readily and cheerfully herein comply with the command of their Superiors? yea, as on the one hand, it were madness to think the Jesuits such fools as not to use this knack to preserve their Religion in general, and their Profession in particular, from so great a scandal which

was

was of that consequence, that the doing otherwise would have frustrated the whole endeavours and end of that Society; (those that have read the *Casuists* among the *Romanists*, will find them dispense with greater Evils than a lye sometimes to save a mans life, or a house from being burned) What may be then done to keep the Religion from Ruine? So on the other hand, it is most rational to judge, that these Jesuits would rather esteem themselves favoured, than wronged by their Superiors, in imposing upon them a necessity thus to assert their Innocency; for since (as is above shewn) their Principles did engage them to believe themselves safe, as to God and Heavenward, by their Obedience, surely it could not but be far more acceptable for them to dye as Innocent Men and Martyrs, than as Traitors and Murderers. If it be thought strange that men at their Death should hold such Principles, it may be also thought strange men should dye believing Transubstantiation, Purgatory, &c. Did not Papists dye rather than renounce the Popes Supremacy in *Henry* the 8*ths*. days? so this will not seem strange to any who consider the power and influence of once receiving or believing any Opinion in matters Religious, for its being placed upon that foot overcomes all reasoning, untill the mind be overpowred by something that can more fully perswade it. Did not Christ put this thing out of doubt when he said, *In killing you they shall think they do God good Service*? and we read that a certain *Indian* made a pile of Wood, and burned himself before *Alexander* the Great, and another afterwards did the like at *Athens*; hence that Proverb of the Ancients *Tantum Religio potuit*. If it be then no wonder to see a Papist dye believing Transubstantiation, it is no wonder to see a Jesuit dye obeying and answering the Rules of his Order; yea, less, since men are usually more Zealous for the performance of those extraordinary Tyes, than for the common Rules of their Religion. As for example, no understanding Papist that will be ingenuous, can deny, but it is esteemed by them a greater sin for a Priest to marry than to commit Adultery with another mans Wife, although the one be to sin against the positive Law of God, and the other only to transgress a human Constitution. So that if we will suppose these Jesuits to have been true, honest and sincere in their own Profession, we may with great charity suppose, yea, we cannot without breach of charity think otherwise, than that, albeit they were guilty of the things charged upon them, yet they both might and ought to have denied them, and that in such manner as they did; and that they could not have done otherwise, unless they had been false and dishonest to their own Principles, and have utterly forsaken them, which we know, and on all hands is confessed, they did not. This I shall evince by one or two Syllogisms deduced from the Maxims abovementioned.

Whoever ought in Obedience to his Superior; *become blind, renounce all his own right Judgment and Will, subject himself unto the Conduct of the same Superior, as to the Providence of God, do all that he Commands, Will all that he Wills, Judge as he Judges, and perswade himself (with the same disposition that the Articles of Faith are believed, or that* Abraham *believed God) that all his Commandments are the Commandments of God himself: ought to obey without exception, and cannot without renouncing his Religion do otherwise.*

And again, whoever swears to obey his Superior, *without making any disquisition or search of his Commandments, whatever they are, and without calling in question whether he commands right or not, ought to obey without reserve or exception, and cannot do otherwise.*

And

And again, whoever ought to ſuffer himſelf, (*as if he were a* Cadaver *or a Staff*) *to be tranſported where and to what uſe the Superior pleaſeth, and hold certainly that whatever he commands is juſt*, ought to obey ſimply, and without any reſpect of the thing commanded.

This is ſo plain, that nothing can be ſaid more evident, ſo that the only queſtion is, Whether the Jeſuits Superiors would or did ſo command? the probability whereof I leave to your Judgment: and I would deſire herein to be underſtood, only to ſhew how theſe dying Jeſuits might have ſo done according to their own Principles, to take away from ſuch as underſtand not, all occaſion of wondering at that, or queſtioning the truth of the Plot upon that head, not that I determine theſe did ſo, *defacto*. That I leave every one to judge as they ſhall ſee moſt cauſe, ſuppoſing other evidence ſufficient; the manner of their dying need not ſtagger any. Much more might be enlarged upon theſe things I have hinted, but I reſolve not to exceed the limits of a Poſt Letter, hoping hitherto I have not been tedious unto you, and that you will let me know your kindly acceptance of this, by tranſmitting to me ſome of thoſe daily Eſſays, whereof this Seaſon ſeems to be very fruitful, in doing whereof you will oblige your real Friend to ſerve you,

From my Cloſet the 6th. *of* October, 1679.

N. N.

F I N I S.

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